

Advice from Past '40 under Forty' Recipients:

If I Knew Then What I Know Now.

Several attorneys recognized as “40 Illinois Attorneys Under Forty To Watch” over the past ten years sit on the Board of Directors of the Coalition of Women’s Initiatives in Law. As we continue to make progress in increasing the number of women climbing to the upper law firm ranks, these women recognize the need to encourage and help other women to excel in the profession. Looking back on their legal careers to date, these women, who come from a wide range of firms and practice areas, offered the following advice to our magazine.

NICOLE NEHAMA AUERBACH, Founding Member, Valorem Law Group

They say that hindsight is 20-20. I also believe that foresight is invaluable. So these are four things that I wish I knew when I was a young attorney:

First, I wish I knew from day one how important it was to keep up with law school classmates, friends from college, etc. By the time business development hit my radar screen, I had already lost touch with a number of potential business sources.

Second, sweat the small things. I’ve always said that I could sooner write a

winning Supreme Court brief than get it on file. Yet our business is peppered with administrative requirements (proper stapling of appellate court briefs, calendaring statutes of limitations, etc.) that have the ability to derail even the most brilliant attorney’s career. If you aren’t good at focusing on details, make sure you are working with someone who is.

Third, you do a disservice to your client by making everything contentious just because you are on the opposing side of a case. You can vigorously advocate for your client and still have a good relationship

with your opposing counsel. The greatest compliment paid to me is getting a referral from a former opposing counsel.

Finally, heed the advice my father has given me since I was young: “Work hard, play hard.” Make sure you build in time for balance. When you look back on your career, it’s unlikely you will remember that you put in the extra hour or two of research or that you edited your brief six times instead of five, but you probably will remember (with a twinge of regret, I suspect) that you missed your 8-year-old’s spelling bee or soccer playoff game.

LESLEE COHEN, Partner, Hershmann & Cohen

It has only been a few years since I received the “40 Under 40” designation, but within that time period I chose to leave the large law firm life to start my own firm. As a result, I have certainly gained new insight. What I wish I knew “then” is the importance of portraying true self-confidence, even when you may

be feeling insecure on the inside. I used to watch the senior males in my office carry this off on a daily basis and they were the ones who controlled the business. Almost everyone you meet is a potential client or referral source who will be drawn to you professionally if you emit the air of being a true authority with

respect to your area of practice. The best part is that by “acting” in this manner you will draw clients and, in representing them, you will most likely discover that you actually are really good at what you do. This, in turn, will help you to feel much more self-confident in the future!

KRISTEN WERRIES COLLIER, Partner, Novack and Macey LLP

Professionalism, “people skills” and networking are integral tools in the practice of law, but they are not emphasized in law school. Fortunately, when I started at Novack and Macey in 1999, my mentors stressed the importance of those related skills and helped me to hone them. I now appreciate

that every interaction -- whether with a judge, client, colleague or opposing counsel -- is an opportunity to improve my professional reputation. Being prepared for court, responsive to clients, respectful of colleagues, and civil to opposing counsel, all contribute to building a reputation as a highly competent,

professional attorney. While producing top-notch work is essential, it is not enough. To be successful, you must also develop the ability to practice in a civil, professional manner -- a skill set that is underappreciated, yet highly valuable. Doing so will both enhance your reputation and make for an enjoyable legal career.

ANGELA R. ELBERT, Partner, Neal Gerber & Eisenberg

As a professional service provider, never forget that you are really in a people business. That is to say, your relationships with others in the business community are critical to your success. Although I’ve always tried to stay connected with my peers, I only realized the true power of networking when I reached the point in

my career of generating my own clients. So get connected and involved early.

There are countless ways to participate in legal or community organizations in which you’re bound to make contacts that will serve as great referral sources and be vital to your success – even if not

until years down the line. Also, try and gain visibility when you are young by writing or speaking about your practice. It’s a worthwhile investment. Many younger lawyers get so wrapped up in learning their trade that they forget about setting a foundation for a successful future.

MARGO WOLF O'DONNELL, Shareholder, Vedder Price

No matter how busy you are with work, always make time for marketing. Marketing can and should be rewarding and fun. Instead of attending random events in the hopes of meeting new clients, take the time to learn the business of your current key contacts and clients. By really learning a business, you can propose and

implement effective legal solutions. Examples of legal solutions for my practice area include new approaches to the handling of litigation, specialized training programs, and revisions to employee handbooks and agreements.

Even when I am not directly marketing to a contact, I make sure to think of

ways I can help them—through job referrals or introductions to other service providers. The fact that I have the power to help clients find solutions enables me to develop lasting relationships that make the practice of law something that I have enjoyed for more than eighteen years.

MARCIA OWENS, Partner, Edwards Wildman Palmer LLP

*At my sister's medical school graduation, the professor chosen by the class to speak offered three words of advice: **Keep showing up.** The professor said that he repeated this advice to the first year med students over and over again. No matter how hard medical school seems, he assured them, if you keep showing up each and every day, you will eventually make it through.*

Those words resonated with me through law school and my early years of practice. Indeed, they resonate with me today and I make a point to pass them on to young lawyers. Why? Not only will they help you

navigate difficult matters, but you will also find that being present and available will open more doors to opportunity.

In our virtual society, it is easy and often tempting to work from home, Starbucks or almost anywhere else. It is also tempting to avoid picking up a phone or having a face-to-face discussion. However, the practice of law is still a people business and a craft that has to be learned and refined; there is simply no substitute for face-to-face communication, whether it is with a fellow attorney, client, witness or opposing counsel. Nonverbal communication is important in our

business, and no attorney has learned the art of counseling a client, arguing a case or conducting a meeting over email alone. You are also more likely to become integrated into your firm's culture and to be considered for leadership or other opportunities at an earlier age if others can physically see your commitment.

So, keep showing up. Be present and don't hide from the face-to-face opportunities. You might be amazed by the number of career-changing matters that grace your doorstep rather than your inbox.

PIA N. THOMPSON, Partner, Gould & Ratner LLP

My advice is to invest in yourself. That investment includes time and money. Do not be complacent and think that your firm will come to you with opportunities for you to grow and prosper. Firms and companies like employees who are successful, and you need to make sure

that you are doing all that you can to be the biggest success possible.

Take responsibility for your own career. Do it as early as you can. Do not think that you need to be a partner before you sharpen your skills as a trial lawyer,

rainmaker, corporate deal closer. Also do not think that you can only get appropriate help from other lawyers. Remember professional golf and tennis players - the best in the world - have many coaches to make sure they stay on top of their game. You should, too.

The Coalition of Women’s Initiatives in Law is comprised of attorneys from more than 50 law firms and businesses located in Chicago. Among other things, this organization offers programming focused on networking and leadership and offers support to the advancement of female attorneys. You can find out more at www.thewomenscoalition.com.